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AUTHOR Morgan, Norah; Saxton, Juliana
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ABSTRACT

The full power of drama as both a teaching and learning medium can be realized only when the inner world of meaning is harnessed to the outer world of expressive action. The teacher has available a number of techniques that can involve the students in the vital interaction of both frames. To involve the students in the expressive frame, the teacher can guide them through five categories of identification: (1) dramatic playing (being oneself in a make-believe situation); (2) mantle of the expert (being oneself, but looking at the situation through special eyes); (3) role playing (being in a role representing an attitude or point of view); (4) characterization (the representation of an individual lifestyle, which is somewhat or markedly different from the student's own); and (5) acting (the selection of symbols, movements, gestures, and voice to represent a particular individual to others). Meaning can be generated by guiding the student through the following levels of personal engagement: evidencing interest (those components without which drama cannot take place), engaging (the active identification with imagined roles and situations), committing (the acceptance of personal engagement and responsibility to the work and the group), internalizing (the intimate interplay between personal feeling and thought and emphatic feeling and thought), demonstrating (the contextual selection for clarity of communication), and evaluating (the testing out of meaning through conscious working in the art form). When teachers use these classifications, they are able to plan lessons more effectively and weave together expression and meaning. (HOD)

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EXPRESSION AND MEANING: THE TWO FRAMES OF DRAMATIC EXPERIENCING

Norah Morgan
Assistant Professor, Drama in Education
Department of Drama
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario

Juliana Saxton
Assistant Professor, Theatre in Education
Department of Theatre
University of Victoria
Victoria, British Columbia

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EXPRESSION AND MEANING: THE TWO FRAMES OF DRAMATIC EXPERIENCING

by: Norah Morgan & Juliana Saxton, August 1984

As trainers of teachers of drama we are dealing with drama as it occurs in the ordinary classroom, on a daily basis throughout the school year. The teachers are working with 25 to 35 students from the primary grades through to the end of secondary school. Our job is to insure that they not only know what to do and how to do it, but why they are doing it. Our obsession is that the full power of drama as a teaching medium is realized by the teacher, and drama as a medium in which learning takes place is experienced by the students.

Almost 100 years of classroom experience as both students and teachers (shared between us we hasten to add!) has taught us one thing: little learning takes place without these three elements:

--a teacher with good teaching skills
--a class with good social health
and a mutual trust and respect

(It is a paradox that one of the most efficient methods for developing good social health is through drama, but social health is a by-product of drama experience and is not synonymous with drama.)

Today we see drama being used in a number of ways:

1. To enable students to develop skills in order to be able to operate within appropriate situations. For example: "Mirrors" is an exercise which helps students to understand the give and take of all shared action.
2. To extend role-playing into the world of imagination, allowing students to face situations which they are unlikely to experience in simulation. For example: What must it be like for us, as citizens at the time of Charles the first, to watch our own king walk towards his place of execution?
3. To generate interest and practise in the arts of the theatre at the performance level. For example: Scripting and rehearsing the missing scene from The Glass Menagerie, between Amanda and the principal of the typing school.

We are not denying that a series of exercises develops and gives practise in the technical skills of dramatic activity, nor that improvising develops and gives practise in the spontaneous creating of storyline, which may be served by the student's personal beliefs and attitudes, nor that doing theatre involves the combining of the technical with the plot and is geared to the importance of the end product, giving an exhilarating sense of achievement. The problem is that both the students and the teacher can get caught up in the externals of these activities and scant attention is paid to that which fuels the expression--that is: the inner world of thought and feeling. The full power of drama can only be realized when the inner world of meaning is harnessed to the outer world of expressive action.

Drama, then, operates in two frames:

The Expressive Frame: the outer manifestation

The Meaning Frame: inner understanding

Both are, and must be seen as interdependant; for expression without meaning is a 'hollow shell', and meaning must have expressive action in order to ratify itself.

We give our drama teachers structures, strategies and techniques which will help them in planning and carrying out their drama lessons. We also give them the means by which they can analyse and evaluate and plan for their students' involvement in the vital interaction of both frames.

The student's involvement in the Expressive Frame we have classified into Catagories of Identification. For our illustrations in each catagory we have chosen a source that should be familiar: Jack and Jill. Some of you may think that this source is appropriate for primary students only. That is not the case. It proved a superb means of engaging a Grade 11 class in an exploration of Acid Rain.

CATEGORIES OF IDENTIFICATION

ME AS MYSELF TO ME AS PERFORMER

1 DRAMATIC PLAYING:

Being oneself in a make-believe situation.

11 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT

Being oneself, but looking at the situation through special eyes.

111 ROLE PLAYING:

Being in role representing an attitude or point of view.

1V CHARACTERIZATION:

The representation of an individual lifestyle, which is somewhat or markedly different fom the student's own.

V ACTING

The selection of symbols, movements, gesture and voice to represent a particular individual to others.

A) Presentation

B) Performance

CATEGORY 1: Being oneself in a make-believe situation.

The student is involved in activities that do not necessarily require him to be anyone other than himself and are designed to place the student in a situation in which he can explore his reactions and actions in a spontaneous way.

For example: The teacher first leads a discussion about pails, water and wells. She then moves her students away from the discussion area towards that part of the classroom where imagination comes into play and where the drama can begin.

"Well! Here we are at the top of the hill with our pails and this sign says: WELL CONDEMNED
BY ORDER
CITY COUNCIL

Now what are we going to do?" (she sits exhausted.)

The responses that the students give are many and varied, depending upon their personal experiences.

An observer looking at the class might say that the students are in role as Water Carriers, but the stress in on requiring the students to respond as themselves in the situation and not on how they think Water Carriers would respond.

Much good drama can take place without the students having to walk in any shoes other than their own.

CATEGORY 11: Wearing the Mantle of the Expert.

Here the students are working as themselves, but under the mantle of the expert. The role is a general one (we are all engineers, advisors, anthropologists...) which implies special skills and expertise that can be brought to bear upon a task. There is no definition of individuals and no attitudes are given by the teacher. The pressure is on the dramatic 'here and now' and work is through the task.

For example: The teacher moves the class to a new area and greets them formally:

"As members of the Water Board, you are the only people who can solve this problem for us. A fresh water supply is available, but I have no idea how to get it here, how much we'll need or what problems may occur in storing it. Here is the plan of the area and the dimensions of the tanks which you may find useful in your calculations."

Here, although still themselves, the students are required to look at the situation through special eyes--those of engineers. This strategy allows the teacher to give up the position of 'the one who knows'. She loses the power of her learning but not the control of the classroom.

CATEGORY 111: Role-playing.

The students are involved here in dealing with a problem where particularization of an attitude or point of view will be one of the means by which the participants will negotiate solutions to the problem. Certain values, real or deemed suitable for the situation, will be tried out and the students, seeing that they are protected by the cover of the role will risk expressing attitudes and points of view which they might not venture in less-protected situations.

For example: The teacher welcomes the group into the classroom, and hands out folders marked: Dr. Richardson--Obstetrics;
Dr. Bedford--Pediatrics;
Dr. Hirsh--Geriatrics....and so on, thus taking a roll call.

"Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are going to have to ration the water. As heads of Departments, I feel it is only fair to involve you in the decisions about which sections of the hospital are to be closed. I recognize that you have been under considerable stress these past few days, but I need not remind you that this hospital has a reputation to uphold. I know it will be difficult for those of you involved in research or with particular patients, but in considering who will go and who will stay, I am sure that you will be thinking of the needs

of all. The areas we might look at are the terminal cases, elective surgery, infectious diseases, pediatrics, geriatrics, diagnostics...."

Expertise is implied through the designation of 'Heads of Departments' and concretized by the dissemination of the folders, but students have, as medical doctors, a position to defend, (not a task to perform as in Mantle of the Expert). It is the 'being', not the 'doing', and the 'me' is often supressed in the interests of the role. It is the first stage in the transfer of identification of self to identification as performer.

CATEGORY 1V: Characterization.

Characterization has been described as 'the outer clothing of the inner life'. It is communication of the representation of a life-style, not consciously to create theatre.

Students who have been role playing will begin to characterize as a means of expressing more fully their inner thought and feelings. The emotional context of the situation and the need to affect others or the situation will impel the student into characterization.

For example: The students have seen a film on Acid Rain in Biology in which householders in a community received, by mail, notice of relocation because of the chemical pollution of the water table affecting the water supply.

The students are concerned about the impersonal nature of the communication. They and the teacher want to see if there are more humane ways of informing the residents.

The teacher takes on the role of the government agent who has hired a team of workers to impart, in person, the information in the official notification.

She leaves the room and enters in role:

" I welcome you to this training session. As you know, more and incidents of relocation of citizens are occuring. The government feels that its image is slipping and has instituted this pilot programme to train personnel in the skills of dealing with the public in situations such as these.

If you look around, you will see chairs arranged in groups of three. Two of you will be householders; the third person is a representative of the agency. Members of the household: will you now establish your relationship, background...etc... The government representatives will have a few moments to plan together how you are going to notify the householders of their impending forced evacuation.

You must show tact, sympathetic concern and firmness. Everyone has to move; there are no exceptions. Just a moment--remember this is a training session but its value will lie in your ability to make it as real as possible." (Note: for some students it is double role-playing: student as 'social worker' as 'householder'.)

Here the roles and the the problem are identified and the teacher-in-role has given strong indications of feeling that can be brought into play, but what feelings the students choose and how they choose to express them are still their own. We are not looking here for consistency because in characterization the student should still be free to explore those feelings and attitudes to discover which are most effective for them in the situation.

Up to this point we have seen the student in the role, but now we begin to see and hear the role itself.

CATEGORY V: Acting.

The fifth category has two facets: presentation and performance. We make this distinction deliberately in order to accommodate two kinds of theatrical products which occur in a school situation. Although we believe, in our experience, that this differentiation is also valid in the professional theatre. That is: presentation is to performance as workshop productions and on-the-road try-outs are to a fully established production.

In presentation the orientation is still process, for the product itself is an element of process; a necessary learning step before performance. The focus for the teacher is the satisfaction of those involved in 'the making of the play'.

In performance, the orientation is to the product and the focus for the students and the teacher is the satisfaction of the audience.

In acting, the student must be able to convey subtleties of nuance and gesture, to 'read', use and work with the energy of the audience and maintain a high degree of energy themselves. Along with communicating the inner life of the character and the meaning and implications within the play itself, the actor is working in all the categories:

-being himself in an imagined situation

-seeing with the eyes of the character

-expressing attitudes and points of view of the character

-representing the character to the audience and at the same time monitoring the whole of the performance, himself included, so that the performance is clean and clear. The skill of acting is to transfer what is happening on stage to the audience in such a way that they see only the character and not the person who is playing the character. The identification of 'me as performer' is now complete.

Students who have been working in any of the first four Categories of Identification have been doing so in a spontaneous and explorative fashion. In any one drama class a student may shift back and forth through the categories depending upon his interest in the situation and his involvement in the strategies and techniques selected by the teacher. The teacher's job is to engage her students in situations of significance, assisting them to deepen their understanding of themselves and others, and giving them opportunities to develop their expressive skills within the drama.

The fifth category--Acting--is a restrictive and highly disciplined activity in which the student is confined to the secondary processes of creativity and is no longer free to shift around spontaneously. What will save his work from becoming a rote representation (full of sound and fury, signifying nothing) are the strategies and techniques used by the teacher, and the student's own ability to maintain the vitality of his engagement with the Meaning frame.

What we have been analyzing to this point is the Expressive frame: that which is seen and heard--the manifestation of the dramatic situation. We have described five categories of identification--from the student who is kindly going along with teacher to the student who is ready to refine his exploration and communicate his ideas through the medium of the art form.

But what about the Meaning frame? that which motivates, supports and sustains the outer Expressive frame?

To leave for a moment the art of the theatre for the art of sport--this being the Olympic State--

In 1983 at the University Games in Edmonton, Alberta, the coach of the gold medal Canadian basketball team describing the importance of a balanced training programme, stated that he reminds his player that "the Intellect is the governor (but) the Emotions are your generator."

So it is in drama. The power of drama as an expressive form of thinking and feeling lies in its concern with the process of <u>personal engagement</u> with the objective world.

Are there levels of engagement the student must travel?

We think so, and have called them: <u>A Taxonomy of Personal Engagement</u>.

We would like to point out here that the taxonomy, unlike the Categories of Identification, is cumulative. Students during their drama work will shift back and forth, but in coming forward the teacher must insure that she helps the students re-engage progressively.

1. INTEREST

THIS REFERS TO THOSE COMPONENTS WITHOUT WHICH DRAMA CANNOT TAKE PLACE.

1.1 Attending:

Because of the process nature of Drama, physical presence is imperative.

1.2 Looking:

Evidenced by making and maintaining eye contact.

1.3 Listening:

Evidenced by congruent, appropriate supportive verbal response.

1.4 Reacting:

Evidenced by congruent, appropriate, supportive non-verbal response.

Since meaning involves thought and feeling, before any learning can take place there must be interest:

--are they there?

--are they looking?

--are they listening?

--are they reacting?

The teacher's function, through her choice of strategies and techniques at this level, is to promote a feeling of curiosity--"What's next?"

If that is in place, then the teacher can begin to help the students to engage in the imaginative world.

2. ENGAGING

THIS REFERS TO THE ACTIVE IDENTIFICATION WITH IMAGINED ROLES AND SITUATIONS.

2.1 Acquiessence in being involved:

Evidenced by participation in a congruent appropriate and supportive manner.

2.2 Willingness to engage:

Agreement to operate 'as if'; the willing suspension of disbelief.

2.3 Relating:

Agreement to accept others, places, and objects into the imagined world.

2.4 Identifying:

Agreement to endow the role with self, summoning past experience to the demands of the present dramatic situation.

2.5 Evaluating:

Satisfaction in the experience

--can you accept this room as the shores of the Pacific?

--can you accept yourself, and the rest of us, as explorers seeing this great ocean for the first time?

--can you think for a moment of some of the hardships we have endured in order to reach this prize?

Teachers often need to spend a lot of time working at this level to insure that the majority are engaged in the imaginative situation and are prepared to endow themselves in the role. Their satisfaction in their ability to participate in the imagined world generates a feeling of anticipation for what is to come. If that feeling is present then there is hope for commitment....

3. COMMITTING

THIS REFERS TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO THE WORK AND THE GROUP. THE INITIAL ACTION OF EMPATHY.

3.1 Accepting limits;

Acquiessence to the Drama framework, bound by the limits of the role and the situation.

3.2 Accepting responsibility:

Recognition of the transfer of power to the role, with the attendant freedom to disagree or change directions by perceiving consequences and implications.

3.3 Empathizing:

Emergence of creative ideas expressed through the attitude and concerns of the role.

Committing does not always follow even if the students themselves seem to express their willingness for it. In Three Looms Waiting, the students working with Dorothy Heathcote wanted to do a play about being prisoners of war. Heathcote gets them to agree that they will go along: "If you want to be in prison camp, you've go to let me take you there, because there is only one of me and fifteen of you!" Even so, they shot her first time around and she was obliged to reiterate the agreement. It takes them a long time to realize that the drama demands them to use their power as prisoners against the Commandant, rather than their power as students against the teacher. To watch Heathcote channelling their antagonistic feelings against authority into the structure of the drama so that the inner meaning is congruent with the outward expression that they have chosen, is one of the best examples of good drama teaching on film that we know of.

Once those students have allowed themselves to be taken into the play, then their creative ideas, attitudes and concerns for the role are free to emerge. Their intense absorption in the work is apparent and internalization is possible.

4. INTERNALIZING

THIS REFERS TO THE INTIMATE INTERPLAY BETWEEN PERSONAL FEELING AND THOUGHT AND EMPATHETIC FEELING AND THOUGHT.

4.1 Organizing, selecting, ordering according to priorities. Refining values, feeling, concerns, beliefs, attitudes and expectations: submitting them to and making them congruent with the role.

We believe that in art, as in life, there are experiences which occur at the deepest level of our beings for which there are no words at the time. In Internalizing, the student has submitted to the feelings intrinsic in the role. Both he and the teacher will have no difficulty in knowing that a shift in understanding has taken place--call it 'a moment of truth'--an aesthetic experience--'peak experiencing' as Mazlow does--we do not need a checklist of behavioural objectives to verify that internalization has occurred.

For example: A few weeks ago I was with a class of Grade 7's. We were working in a drama in which they had discovered a primitive tribe and were determined to 'educate' them in the ways of the West.

After an incident where one of their members and a member of the tribe had been mauled by a jaguar, the westerners held a meeting. Revenge was in the air. The beast, who was being protected by the tribe must be caught and killed.

Amidst the clamour, one boy rose slowly and said:

"There is no place for us here. These primitive people have more concern for life and nature than we have. They understand that the jaguar was in his place and we were intruding."

He turned and walked away. The rest of the class rose as a body and followed him, save for one girl who remained with her head in her hands.

Nothing further was said, and there was no need at that moment for words. The next day I asked them if they were ready to talk about it. I chose to go into role as a concerned member of the group, saying:

"How are we going to explain the apparent failure of our mission?"

The students chose to write letters to be read by their grandchildren.

A teacher must be able to employ the strategy of reflection, so that students may have an opportunity to examine and synthesize their new understanding. This release of feelings intrinsic to the role through another medium (in this case writing and distancing) or through another facet of dramatic activity, we have called Demonstrating.

5. DEMONSTRATING

THIS REFERS TO THE CONTEXTUAL SELECTION FOR CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION, NOT CONSCIOUSLY TO CREATE THEATRE.

5.1 Communicating:

Listening, observing, judging effect, predicting other points of view; expression of thought and feeling particular to the role.

5.2 Experimenting:

Experimentation with expression (voice, gesture, props, etc.) to discover that which seems most appropriate.

5.3 Adapting:

Readiness to consider other ideas; readiness to consider experience outside self, and readiness to use either or both in the service of the role and/or the situation.

5.4 Analyzing:

Willingness to analyze feeling through defending a point of view.

5.5 Reflecting:

Willingness to operate in the reflective mode through spoken or written work, through graphics, physical action, or inner reflection.

In Demonstrating, the student must be prepared to talk about his feelings, listen to others, experiment with the expression of those feelings, adapt so that other's feelings may also have expression and he must be confident enough to submit his feelings to analysis.

For example: Two years ago I was working on a docudrama with a group of adults. A display called The Japanese Experience in Canada had been hung in the lobby of our building. We had decided that there was plenty of material for research and lots of dramatic possibilities; the most dramatic of all being the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War and the seizing of their property, which has never been returned and for which they have received no compensation. My students felt very hot about this, but were glad, they said, that this could never happen again. Work proceeded and some good stuff was beginning to emerge and be set. On the radio about a week before we were to present, some heard the morning news. It was announced that the office of the Attorney General of Canada had revealed plans which designated special areas of the country to be set aside for the 'holding' of those nationals deemed a threat to the state in the event of war. We were stunned! Had there been more time we could, perhaps, have been able to use this feeling in the presentation --there was not. We chose rather to write a letter to the Prime Minister and his cabinet that was as elegant and as carefully prepared as any theatre presentation.

6. EVALUATING

THIS REFERS TO THE TESTING OUT OF MEANING THROUGH CONSCIOUS WORKING IN THE ART FORM.

6.1 Dramatizing:

Selection of appropriate theatrical elements to enhance thought and feeling.

6.2 Symbolizing:

Development of symbolic expression to convey significant meaning.

6.3 Monitoring:

Detached observation, of the effect of action.

6.4 Re-creating:

Evidenced by the revitalizing of the technical past by the feeling present.

6.5 Communicating:

Satisfaction in the shared significant experience.

Evaluating is the testing out of private feeling in the public forum. The student must be able to express the feelings intrinsic in the role in such a way that the audience may hold them long enough to internalize them, and then to deal with the emanationsof feeling which the audience will return to him. How careful we must be to prepare our students to engage at this level.

At the Ontario Sears Drama Festival this year after a production of Canada at War by a group of 20 high school students, we left for intermission deeply moved but wondering if it was simply our ages which had caused us to respond so deeply. We overheard a group of 17/18 year olds ahead of us:

"I cried."

"So did I."

(silence)

"That could have been us if we'd been alive."

(silence)

"That was us. Then."

SUMMARY

We have illustrated the 5 Categories of Identification in the Expressive frame and the 6 levels in the Taxonomy of Personal Engagement in the Meaning frame. They do not run parallel to one another for a student may well be at the commitment level of engagement while operating the Mantle of the Expert, and many of us have been in the position of watching 'professionals' operating in the Acting category when they can barely generate interest for themselves, let alone for their audience!

We have discovered that when our teachers understand these classifications, not only do they plan their drams lessons more effectively, but in their implementation (which is the true test of good teacher training) they are able to select strategies and techniques which engender a more richly expressive frame woven together with a more deeply felt and intellectually significant meaning frame. The full power of the art form is released and made available to their students, whether in the classroom exploration or theatre presentation.